



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA | EXTENSION

CENTER FOR FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

# Healthy Food, Safe Food: Summary of Focus Groups with SNAP-Ed and SHIP Employees

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# Background

The Healthy Food, Safe Food (HFSF) Project is a partnership between University of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development and Minnesota Department of Health's (MDH's) Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives (OSHII). HFSF's goal was to conduct a formative evaluation to aid in developing a plan of action to address regulatory barriers to improve access to healthy foods, while simultaneously maintaining and enhancing food safety. Between July 2015 and July 2016, the HFSF project team conducted a listening session, key informant interviews, and focus groups, followed by analysis and planning meetings.

Summaries of the listening session, key informant interviews, and focus groups, as well as the health equity review, are available here: <http://z.umn.edu/hfsf>. This report summarizes what was learned through focus groups with University of Minnesota Extension and MDH employees.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to gather input for a multi-year plan of work for the Healthy Food, Safe Food project.

The study answers three questions:

- What kind of food safety and related regulations get in the way of people accessing healthy foods?
- What might SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education) educators and SHIP (Minnesota Department of Health's Statewide Health Improvement Partnership) do about these barriers?
- What kind of support or training do SNAP-Ed and SHIP employees need to do this kind of work?

## METHOD

In the fall of 2015, our team conducted four focus group interviews with a total of 34 county and regional SNAP-Ed and SHIP employees throughout Minnesota.

LOCATION	SHIP	SNAP-ED	TRIBAL HEALTH	TOTAL
GRANITE FALLS	4	4	1	9
MORA	4	5	0	9
OWATONNA	3	5	0	8
DETROIT LAKES	3	4	1	8
TOTAL	14	18	2	34

Each group interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method<sup>1</sup>, used for multiple focus groups on the same topic to be compared with each other for similar and emerging themes. This report summarizes the findings from these four focus groups.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Constant Comparative method, visit <http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2008/11/29/the-constant-comparative-method-of-qualitative-analysis-1/>.

# Barriers to Accessing Healthy, Safe Foods

We asked SNAP-Ed and SHIP professionals to tell us what kind of food safety and related regulations get in the way of people accessing healthy foods. They shared these concerns about barriers created by regulations:

- Food regulations create fear.
- Minnesota's food safety system and rules are overly complicated and confusing.
- Food code regulations and changes in organizational priorities are barriers to food demonstrations, tastings, and teaching.
- Regulations and concerns about food safety limit healthy food options for vending machines, concession stands, school birthday parties, and food shelves.
- Food safety regulations contribute to food waste.
- Food safety regulations increase costs.
- There is a lack of GAP-certified growers due to a cumbersome certification process.
- Because of regulations, it feels overwhelming to work for greater access to healthy, safe foods.

Each of these concerns is discussed in more detail in this section.

## FOOD REGULATIONS CREATE FEAR

Professionals interviewed in focus groups, and the people they work with, tend to believe that Minnesota's food code is a mysterious, complicated set of rules that can get you in trouble. To make things worse, they are afraid of being penalized by the sanitarians who know and enforce the rules.

### SNAP-Ed and SHIP employees fear making a food safety mistake

SNAP-Ed and SHIP staff who promote healthy foods are concerned about liability. One focus group participant talked about losing sleep for several days prior to doing a food tasting at a farmers market. She said the food safety requirements are cumbersome and she worried that she might make a mistake.

Another participant said their county is adding funds to grant applications for attorney fees in case a food safety problem occurs during grant implementation.

"Let's say I'm supporting an event at the farmers market and a community member gets sick. Who is liable? Is it the county? Our county says, 'We might be liable. If we have an outbreak, that's on us.' So they are very fearful of supporting locally grown producers for fear there might be some sort of outbreak. That's a huge barrier. For SHIP 2.0 they are putting a lot of money into the attorney, just in case..."

Focus group participants discussed whether the food safety rules they have to adhere to are out of proportion to the risk — particularly related to their work with food demonstrations.

"Is it [concern about food safety] out of proportion? Because it's a small chance that something's going to happen."

Focus group participants asked:

- Who is liable if a county employee is connected to a case of food poisoning?
- What are the consequences of being connected to a case of food poisoning?
- Would SHIP or SNAP-Ed staff lose their jobs [if they were connected to a case of food poisoning or were associated with a food safety violation]?

Here are comments from two participants:

"I'm worried about my own liability."

"I'm going to err on the side of caution because I don't want to get [hits table with hand]."

### Institutions fear being held liable for food safety problems; they believe food purchased from food distributors is safer than local foods

Schools, hospitals, nursing homes, food shelves, day care facilities, and stores worry about liability. Many believe local foods pose greater food safety risks than foods purchased from food distributors. Here's what one focus group participant said:

"With our current system, we created this fear of local produce. When you talk to managers at local stores or food service providers about 'Can we bring in local produce from this farm?' The immediate reaction is like, 'No, why would I want to do that, because I'm going to step into safety issues.' They can just buy food through a truck [from a distributor] — they have their own insurance company if anything goes wrong. It's them [their responsibility]. I don't want to be part of it. That way of thinking, I think it's going to take a long time to get over that barrier. In my opinion, [getting] healthy foods should be as easy as getting unhealthy foods through a truck. Or simpler."



Some focus group participants believe there are institutions that point to liability as the reason they don't use local produce, but that the real reason they rely on foods from their distributor is that it is easier than using local foods. Here's what two participants said:

"I ran into one school that was doing farm to school but the food director didn't like getting the produce from them because it came in dirty. It was a lot more work and they have limited staff because of cuts." [Second participant]: "They probably don't want to say, 'I don't want to deal with that.' And they just say, 'I can't. We aren't allowed to do it.'"

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### **Licensees and potential licensees fear food safety inspectors**

Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Environmental Health workers had a bad image among people we interviewed. Although focus group participants agreed that not all inspectors are the same, they expressed fear of them and said they believed inspectors are:

- Unapproachable.
- Unwilling to work with you and help you figure out how to make something work.
- Rigid and just say "no."
- Judging you, looking for what is wrong.
- There to make things more difficult, not to help you.

Here's what five participants said about inspectors:

"One of the food shelves that we visited has an awesome commercial kitchen that they use for demonstrations. I've mentioned it to other food shelf directors that I work with, and one director said 'Absolutely not. You should hear so-and-so talk about all the regulations that they have to follow and how often MDH is there, making sure they are doing everything right.' They don't want that headache. And that goes along with sampling and being careful. They don't want to take chances and stuff. They don't want MDH or the food safety police there on a super regular basis."



“It’s not seen as a partnership — like I’m here to help you do it right. ... [It’s like] I’m here to ding you.”

“They [inspectors] are just wanting them [licensees] to be safe, but I think people are looking at it as, ‘They’re judging how we’re doing things again.’”

“You get a lot of ‘No’s.’ That is what I get.”

“They’re too rigid. We’ve gone through it with our counties and they are quite different. Mine is very rigid.”

## **MINNESOTA’S FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM AND RULES ARE OVERLY COMPLICATED AND CONFUSING**

### **Minnesota’s food safety system is confusing**

Focus group participants noted that several different agencies set different rules and regulations, which can be hard to follow:

- Different institutions and different populations are governed by different rules, e.g., high risk populations are governed by different rules than low risk populations.
- Food management companies have different sets of rules and regulations related to food safety, which may be different from state regulations.
- Counties may have different rules than each other and the state.

Complicated rules governed by different agencies leads to confusion. Some institutions believe there are food safety rules against using local produce, meat, and honey. Some schools believe they can’t use produce from their school garden. Some food shelves believe they can’t accept local produce. Here are comments from three focus group participants:

“A lot of schools...don’t think they are allowed to buy produce or meat or honey or whatever from farmers. They think there’s a health department law against it.”

“They [schools] are afraid to buy produce locally. And they think it’s not in accordance with health department rules. Part of it is just not wanting to do it.”

“It’s lack of complete understanding of rules and regulations. That causes fear.”

### **People aren’t sure whom to contact for information because different agencies govern different things**

Here are comments from six focus group participants:

“There is a lot of confusion. I went to a Minnesota Farmers Market Association meeting and they had a group from the MDH and a group from MDA [Minnesota Department of Agriculture]. Everything was just so complicated. You have to make sure you are getting in touch with the right agency. It seems like there aren’t hard and fast rules. It seems like each situation is a bit different.”

“Where would a food shelf look for those regulations [related to food demos]? What would it be called?”

“Where is the food code listed?”

“Where do you find the sanitarian? USDA [United States Department of Agriculture]? MDH? [Second participant]: “That is part of the problem right there. People don’t know where to go.”

“When you look to [high-risk] populations and then you have a food service director from the hospital trying to get clarification, and maybe a dietitian trying to get clarification. Then you have a farmer trying to get clarification. Everybody’s going to try to get clarification. Maybe one going to the

Department of Health. One going to the Department of Ag. You get all these different answers, and then you can't sort it out.”

Even the professionals are confused. In each of the focus groups, participants shared information related to food safety regulations that they thought to be true, only to learn from their colleagues — or Tim Jenkins — that it wasn't. Here's what one participant said:

“Sometimes it is about the perceptions and misperceptions rather than the actual regulations. I get asked all the time, ‘What's allowed at farmers markets?’ ‘What's really covered under the Pickle Bill?’<sup>2</sup> Sometimes I get confused myself. I have to be reminded. Are pickled green beans allowed? Can you pressure cook stuff to sell if it is done in a certified kitchen? I don't know. Those get confusing even though I know we have made progress on that.”

## **FOOD CODE REGULATIONS AND CHANGES IN ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITIES ARE BARRIERS TO FOOD DEMONSTRATIONS**

SNAP-Ed educators and their SHIP partners strongly believe that food tastings and demonstrations are powerful tools for exposing people to new, healthy foods. Based on their experiences, they know these activities change behaviors. Here's what three SNAP-Ed educators in focus groups said:

“If we don't expose people to healthier choices by letting them sample, how are they ever going to know what something tastes like? [How can we] encourage them to use it in their households?”

“I went to the food shelf and they had beautiful heads of cabbage. I was there for three hours and not one family would take a head of cabbage because they didn't know what to do with it. If you demo [a food] and show them what they can do with it, [and] share the recipes, they may be open to taking it.”

“We all know that when people have samples or they see how something is cooked...the [farmers market] vendors that have the ingredients sell out.”

Yet, changes in food code and organizational priorities are making it more difficult to use the tools of food tastings and demonstrations.

### **The Minnesota Food Code is a barrier to food demonstrations, tastings, and teaching**

Focus group participants made four key points about food code regulations.

#### **Food code regulations governing demonstrations are confusing.**

Regulations governing food demonstrations vary based on things like where the demonstration is being done, serving size, and who is doing the demonstration. Each location or situation seems governed by a different set of rules: farmers markets, food shelves, stores, classes. Each location has to figure out what can and can't be done on its own. Each facility is interpreting the rules individually. And volunteers are governed by a different set of rules than professionals. Focus group participants asked the following questions:

- Why can professionals do food tastings outside at a farmers market but not outside at a food shelf?
- Why are there different requirements based on sample size?
- Why can SNAP-Ed educators do food demos at a food shelf but food shelf staff, public health staff, or volunteers can't?

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<sup>2</sup> The Pickle Bill has been replaced by the Cottage Food Bill, but this participant isn't aware of this — which just emphasizes the participant's point.

- Why is cooking in churches OK but not in other places?
- What's needed to do demos at different sites? Certification? A permit? A license?

Here are comments on food demonstrations from two focus group participants:

"You need soap and water within so many feet. You must listen to a webinar. Serving sizes can only be so big. People already feel overwhelmed with paperwork and this adds more forms to fill out. I'm not even sure who to send the forms to — MDH or MDA?"

"We did a SHIP-sponsored farmers market sampling training session. I guarantee you those vendors did not walk away thinking, 'We can do this.' Their minds were blown. They walked away sad, probably saying, 'We just can't.' That's what they learned from the training. They learned that there are just a myriad of laws and regs tied to this..."

### **Food code requirements are cumbersome and/or expensive.**

Focus group participants made the following points about food code requirements:

- To do a demonstration at a farmers market requires a license, which requires money, time, and paperwork.
- Most farmers markets are run by volunteers, so time and money are issues.
- The cost of the license prohibits small markets from offering samplings and prohibits larger markets from doing so every week.
- It seems like we're charged different amounts for a license because we understand the requirements differently.
- Demonstrating at farmers markets requires water and soap within so many feet, which means hauling water, disposing of water.
- The webinar explaining the requirements for food tastings at farmers markets was so complicated that many people opted out.
- Food code requirements for demonstrations at food shelves are different. Requiring a three-compartment sink limits their ability to do demonstrations.

Here are comments from five focus group participants:

"There are a few regulations that seem incredible to me. Like, I'm out in the middle of a parking lot and the water that I've washed my hands with — I can't even dump that in the parking lot. I'm supposed to take the water back — in my car — and dump it down a toilet...That seems a little crazy to me."

"It is a lot of work if you want to make sure you are doing it right. So people are saying, 'We're not going to do it.'"

"We don't have a manager [at our farmers market]. It is all volunteer. So who does it [ensure food code requirements are followed]?"

"[Following the food code] is a lot of paperwork and we are already overwhelmed."

"We used to do samples at the food shelves but we've backed off because of all the regulations."

### **Food code requirements limit what professionals can or are willing to do.**



When doing food demonstrations, professionals are not allowed to prepare ingredients at one location — even if it is a commercial kitchen — and transport it to another location. Everything must be done on site. This means they can't use healthy, inexpensive foods that require longer cooking times, such as beans or pasta. They can't cut up a pepper or onion ahead of time to make the lesson more efficient. It means they can't demonstrate recipes featured on the USDA website or Recipe Finder because they don't have enough time to complete everything in the time allotted. Food code requirements limit what they could do both for one-time demonstrations and ongoing classes.

Two focus group participants commented on how food code requirements limit the ability to conduct food demonstrations:

"I do [demonstrations at] a farmers market and there is no electricity. I could do a pasta salad or a quinoa salad, but the pasta or quinoa would have to be precooked. I could do everything else right there at the market... We have had our jobs for a long time. We know food safety precautions. We know how cold things need to be kept. And, yes, pasta and quinoa, if not kept at the proper temperature could have pathogens grow. But it's so very limiting as far as what you can demo if you can't do anything ahead of time."

"In regard to sampling in general, it really turns people away from wanting to do it for fear of doing it wrong — for fear of being liable if something happens. After we watched that hour-long webinar, we said, 'Hey, I guess we're not going sampling'... That's speaking from the Extension standpoint. I can only imagine what the food shelf and farmers market individuals [think]. They are probably feeling overwhelmed."

### **Food code requirements generate fear.**

Both professionals and nonprofessionals fear not being in compliance with food code requirements and don't know the ramifications of not being in compliance.

Here are comments from four focus group participants:

"The confusion around food demos came up at one of our last food shelf meetings. They just don't know what the current rules and regulations are. Some food shelves think that they can do demos and some think they can't. So most of them just aren't doing them. They don't want to get in trouble. But they would really like to [have demonstrations]. There needs to be more clarity around the demo part of it and food shelves."

"At the farmers markets I work with, they are scared of the different things that are needed to be compliant."

"Even the professionals fear the inspector showing up while they are serving samples."

"Two Saturdays ago we had a sampling at a farmers market and I could not sleep for like three days... In the middle of the night I was thinking, Oh, my goodness, how am I going to bring all that water? I better have a cart. They want me ready by 8, so what time do I have to go to do all these things? Probably 6. It turned out that the people hosting me were wonderful. They helped me a lot... But it does play on the psychological part of your brain... 'How is this going to be?'"

### **There are organizational barriers to demonstrating foods**

Focus group participants made the following points about organizational barriers to food demonstrations:

- Food demos are not a priority.



- Food demos are not considered PSE<sup>3</sup>.
- If food demos aren't part of their grant or job description — they can't do them.
- Professionals don't have evaluation data that supports their belief that food tastings change behaviors.
- Staff are being told to train volunteers to do food demos, but the regulations around what volunteers can do are unclear.
- It is difficult to find volunteers who have the time, training, right personality, and budget for equipment to do the demos.

Here's what several focus group participants said:

"I've been trying to figure out how to call it PSE."

"It doesn't fit our plan — our grant duties. That's considered indirect teaching and they don't know how big an impact it has. So our time and money is spent on what we think is more impactful, like direct education, and teaching volunteers to do demos at the food shelves, if they could."

"They want you to have a cooking class...associated with the demonstration. We know that demonstrations help people use more [fruits and vegetables] but what your program is saying is, 'Nope. We want it to be associated with a class that's offered multiple times.'"

"If there was better data on it, maybe it would change. Our programs like to see evaluations. Has it helped? Has this changed people's lives, or what they buy and what they eat?" [Second person]: "At the farmers market, who's going to do that? Who is going to collect that data?"

"Do the regulations for volunteers differ from what we've always done? We're being told to do a lot of train the trainer so that other people can do what we used to do. So at what point are they able to do everything that we used to do? We had training in food safety. We know the proper temperature for food storage. How do we train someone else to do that?"

"Personally, I have not had a lot of luck getting volunteers to do food demos."

"Do they [volunteers] have the health and food safety training? Train the trainers would have to run the full gamut." [Second person]: "We feel we're lacking in our education as SNAP-Ed [educators]. [Third person]: "Our volunteers are in [their] 70s and 80s...and have different food safety thoughts. Trying to change them, helping them take on our roles, that's a challenge...They are a little more scared of the one-to-one things."

"They [volunteers] don't have time. They don't have the equipment. They don't have an employer who is purchasing a frying pan or blender or portion cups or gloves. They don't have any of that so they are not willing to take the place that we used to play. Maybe if they got more knowledge and equipment, maybe they would."

"Some of us are hoping our job descriptions ease up so we can do that [demos] again."

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<sup>3</sup> PSE refers to policy, system, and environmental change. SNAP-Ed educators work to bring about these types of changes as part of working within the framework of the Spectrum of Prevention. Read more about the Spectrum of Prevention here: <http://z.umn.edu/sw6>.



## **FOOD SAFETY CONCERNS LIMIT HEALTHY FOODS FOR VENDING MACHINES, CONCESSION STANDS, SCHOOL BIRTHDAY PARTIES, AND FOOD SHELVES**

In some environments, there aren't good options for foods that are safe and healthy. Following are some examples.

### **Vending machines offer few healthy options**

Here are comments from two focus group participants on vending machines and healthy, safe foods:

"The smart snacks regulations in the vending machines at the schools...it's not the healthy food that we would want in there. It's like 10 percent less sugar... I recently met with our vendor for worksite wellness and he's like, 'Well, this meets all the smart snack regulations for schools.' And it was like reduced fat Doritos. Is that what we're trying to do? I don't think so."

"I've gone to different places and the vending machines really surprised me, to tell you the truth. I went to a hospital and the first thing I see is a vending machine with Coke and all those products. And I'm thinking, they have very strict regulations for alcohol, maybe we should have very strict regulations for pop. Like it cannot be sold within a hundred meters of the school...because it's too easily available. It's, 'Here you go. On your way out the door, grab your soda.' It's too readily available in my eyes. [Another participant]: 'It's a lack of regulation [regarding the nutritional value of food and beverages available].'"

### **Schools require birthday treats to be pre-packaged, and either purchased at a store or catered through the school**

As a result of food safety and health concerns, there are few healthy, fun birthday treat options for parents to purchase. Some schools now cater these events, but some catering options still aren't healthy and are too expensive for many parents.

Here are comments from four focus group participants on birthday treats and healthy, safe foods:

"I like that school-wide policy that only pre-packaged treats can be provided because [that's] safe. But I'd much rather...order from the food service. Then they can have some other options provided safely."

"In Latino communities, celebration is a very important part of the culture. You tell us [about] a fiesta, and we're like, 'Oh yes, where is it?' One... of the participants in my workshops said their daughter had a birthday and the teacher said she could bring a little something to celebrate with the classmates. They sent something that grandma had prepared and they couldn't serve it... She thought it was better because grandma handmade something special for everybody. But it came out that the little girl couldn't have the celebration, and she didn't know that because she was new to the community."

"We asked my daughter's teacher if we could we bring in a bag of apples. And she said, 'Oh yeah I could cut up apples for the kids' treat.' Later we find out she cannot cut up apples in the classroom because of regulations. So the alternative is a pre-packaged, stale something. What am I supposed to give my kids? I don't want to do cupcakes."

"For school snacks...for the safety part, there aren't healthy options. You can't bring any fruits and vegetables... I mean a box of raisins, or you get a little carrot."

"Our school district's food service company can cater the snack through the food service, but it's all prepackaged stuff. I have no doubt that it meets all the regulations, but it's all packaged junk. It isn't living food [fresh, recently harvested, not processed]."

### **Food sold at concession stands must be shelf stable**

Some focus group participants are working to increase healthy options at concession stands for school events, but the challenge is that the foods must be shelf stable because the stands store leftovers from week to week.

Here's what one focus group participant said:

"I'm working with schools to get healthier options in vending machines and concession stands at sporting events. But they also don't want to have extra at the end of the event. They want to store for the next sporting event. But then it has to be shelf stable... We were working with one school for a while. We got a couple of options in. [The situation is] healthier, but it's not really healthy."

### **Food shelves lack healthy foods**

Many food shelves lack storage for fresh, healthy foods that aren't shelf stable. Small food shelves aren't open often enough to take and distribute healthy foods. Even the USDA NAPS (Nutrition Assistance Program for Seniors) boxes provide foods that could be healthier.

"I'd like to see our food shelves offer healthier foods. We're working with low-income people and basically we give them processed food or high salt [foods]."

"It's hard because they [food shelves] don't have the storage. Maybe instead of all the commodities they could get vouchers to grocery stores for fruits and vegetables."

"At a policy level, look at what is in the NAPS boxes. If they get evaporated milk, it should be evaporated skim milk. Their cereal should always be whole grain cereal. So USDA is saying, 'Here is what you should eat, but we are going to put something different in your box.' There is a policy [to work on]."

### **FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS CONTRIBUTE TO FOOD WASTE**

Focus group participants were concerned about food waste in their own programs and in other settings. Here's what one participant said:

"The food waste issue is so important. None of us really knew much about that. Personally, that is my number one priority walking out of this room. I need to learn more about this and especially what opportunities might be out there to get more food to people who need it, who are eating out of dumpsters right now."

### **Waste in their own programs**

The primary clients of SNAP-Ed and SHIP are low income people whose families may not have enough food to eat. However, food safety regulations require that leftover foods must be thrown away. Clients cannot take the food home to share with their families or let them taste what they prepared in classes or workshops.

Wasting food goes against the values of many clients and professionals alike. Some professionals believe the concern for food safety is out of proportion to the situation. One professional said she works with people who live in ice fishing shelters. For her, throwing food away for fear of food safety issues seemed ridiculous.

Several focus group participants commented on food waste:

"[Clients] can't take leftovers from class." [Second person]: "Unless we do a Cooking Matters class where we send all the groceries home... They are very upset when we have to throw things out."

"We work with all low income families. If you don't have enough food just to feed your family for the week and you're seeing all this food thrown away..." [Second person]: "It's sick. It's wrong." [Third



person]: “I have enough to feed my family all the time and I hate it.” [Fourth person]: “I can’t stand it either.”

“It is almost as though we’ve forgotten what common sense is. These people, a lot of times, are homeless...A lot of people are eating out of a dumpster. They live in ice fishing houses in the winter and parks in the summer.”

Because of the rules about tossing un-used food, SNAP-Ed and SHIP staff encourage the program participants to eat as much as they want, because everyone knows the food will be thrown away. This goes against their teachings about portion sizes. Two focus group participants said:

“If you are working with a lot of immigrant families, some of them are coming from war-torn countries where they were in refugee camps. And then I’m like, ‘Sorry, you can’t take this home. I have to throw it away.’ And they are like, ‘Really? What are you doing?’ I just think it is a mixed message that we are sending.” [Second person]: “It’s a huge mixed message. We’re trying to talk about portion control but then we are saying, ‘Go ahead and go back for seconds because I don’t want this food to go to waste.’”

### **Waste in schools**

Food safety regulations result in a great deal of food waste. Poor kids can’t take their leftover food home from school. Fruit that could be used is tossed. Here are comments from two focus group participants about food waste in schools:

“Breakfast in the classroom is a wonderful thing. But the leftover food can’t be stored in lockers or put in backpacks to bring home. It seems like, if it is an unopened package, can we do something about that?”

“The school food service issues [rules] that they have to follow [about] all the fruit and vegetables that go on everybody’s plate. There is so much waste with that. I’ve talked with many of the social workers — they are frustrated. Because an apple or banana or orange has to go in the garbage. Why can’t that go on a table for people [students] who are coming in to see them later that day? People [students] who are having a bad day, probably because they are hungry.”

### **Waste in stores and restaurants**

Focus group participants wondered if there were ways that stores and restaurants could be encouraged to redistribute foods that would otherwise go to waste. Here are comments from three participants:

“I have a question about food waste. You hear the statistic that half of our food is just wasted between what is left in the field and what gets thrown away in restaurants and stores. I don’t know what the regulations are. What’s allowed in a restaurant? What’s allowed in Walmart? I’d be really interested to hear the regulations around food waste and what the opportunities are. Especially when you consider our low-income folks or emergency food settings and places that could so greatly benefit from all that food that is wasted.”

“I’ve seen produce that’s been thrown away at the grocery store that I certainly wouldn’t hesitate to eat. I know our people at the food shelves would love to get it. I don’t know much about the regulation. I’m embarrassed that I don’t know because I’ve often thought about approaching a couple of my local grocers on why they don’t do more donating.”

“Walmart is a big donator to food shelves...but it is apparently written into their bylaws that it has to stay at the local food shelf, which is unfortunate because I’ve seen them get shipments that there is no way that little food shelf can go through that produce. But they [food shelves] won’t call Sebek or Menahga or New York Mills that could be there in 10 minutes.”

### **Waste in food shelves**





Focus group participants said some food shelves either don't take perishable food or have to throw food away because:

- They don't have enough refrigeration or freezer capacity.
- They don't have the facilities to process foods from their own gardens [at food shelves].
- They don't know if they can accept foods from gardens.
- They can take only non-perishable foods because they are only open once or twice a month.
- The distribution system delivers more food than they can distribute in a single day.
- The food safety regulations are too cumbersome.

Here are comments from two participants about waste in food shelves:

"We have a way smaller food shelf...They [the food shelf] get so much food they have to throw it. So it may be the way it is distributed or delivered. We can't meet the needs of every food shelf in the same way. Maybe we should look at some of the things we could do with smaller food shelves. Our communities are very poor — at least where I am. People want food. There are all these disconnects."

"People really want to donate venison to our food shelf. It used to be that the venison could go to a certified meat processor. But now because of lead that was found...deer have to travel from anywhere in the state to Minneapolis to be x-rayed for lead. Then the same venison is supposedly going back to the food shelf. People found out and said, 'It's not cost effective. It's ridiculous. I want my venison to go to my food shelf. If you can't guarantee that, I'm not going to donate the venison.' Anyone who eats venison knows that it's gunshot. [meaning to point out that today's bullets don't contain lead] Maybe there's a waiver that could be signed, [saying something like] 'This venison is processed at an approved facility, but there could be risks associated with it.' To have it travel to Minneapolis and back is just ridiculous."

## **FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS INCREASE COSTS**

Additional costs related to food safety include:

- Cost of equipment required by the food code, including the three-compartment sink rule.
- Time to clean and prepare foods.
- Licensing fees and time required to get and maintain a license.
- Cost of ServSafe® training.
- Cost of having a ServSafe®-trained employee available when needed.
- Cost of liability insurance.

ServSafe® is one of the approved trainings to become a certified food manager. State law requires most food service establishments to have a certified food manager on staff. The cost for the training ranges from \$150 to \$200.

Focus group participants said the additional costs of food safety regulations can be prohibitive for small organizations like food shelves, after-school programs, and day care center. Here's what one participant said:

"It used to be, we could all go to any church and cook in their kitchen and that was good. Now we have one church in Aitkin County where we can go, because there's only one that has gone for certification. I don't know if it's costly. I don't know if they need to update things. I'm not sure what the barrier is...."

### **LACK OF GAP-CERTIFIED GROWERS DUE TO A CUMBERSOME CERTIFICATION PROCESS**

Some institutions do want to purchase locally grown foods, but prefer to buy from GAP-(Good Agricultural Practices) certified growers. Focus group participants assert that there aren't enough GAP-certified growers because the process of becoming certified is time-consuming, confusing, costly, and requires a lot of paperwork. Following are two representative comments from participants:

"I know the Minneapolis Public School system is trying to purchase more [food] from local growers for their lunch menu. But they only want to purchase from growers who have the GAP certification or food safety training. And a lot of those [local growers] are really small urban farmers just getting started. They have food to sell, but they don't have the food safety knowledge or the certifications or the right credentials behind them. So there is a mismatch there."

"Some of the requirements to be GAP certified are overwhelming and costly, especially if farms want to be more integrated — having produce and livestock on the same farm can be really tough."

### **'IT FEELS OVERWHELMING TO DO THIS WORK'**

Focus group participants said doing policy, systems, and environment work within the food system feels overwhelming because:

- It is a complicated system to understand.
- It is difficult to know where to start and what would make a difference.
- It is incredibly time consuming and there are only so many hours in a day.
- They don't feel they have the power or the resources to make change.

Here's a sample of comments from several participants:

"You almost feel like you need to go get a degree in food systems before you can do any of this work."

"I think it is overwhelming...There's a barrier."

"If food service people don't want to deal with you...who should have the power? Well, the school board should have the power. Now you have to ask to get on the school board [agenda]. That can be real hard to do. Or, you're welcome to come in and make public comments for like two minutes. You go every week and present for those two minutes."

"It just becomes so much work for you to get something changed...How much time do you think I get paid [for], and how much extra time do I want to put in?"

"[It is hard to create change because] a lot of our food service directors don't have staff time [to use locally grown foods]. They're on a limited budget. And it's the preparation. They don't even have the right equipment."

"[If you suggest changes to school food service people they say], 'I do it this way. That's how my grandma taught me. I'm doing it right.'"



# Solutions to Accessing Healthy, Safe Foods

We asked SNAP-Ed and SHIP professionals the following questions:

- What might SNAP-Ed or SHIP employees do to address these issues?
- What resources do you need to work on these efforts?

Their suggestions include:

- Work to change policies.
- Support infrastructure, including an information clearinghouse, food hubs and community kitchens, three-compartment sinks, and mobile kitchens.
- Create new positions to support this work.
- Provide training.
- Provide materials.
- Provide direction.
- Encourage relationships.
- Provide long-term consistent funding.
- Reduce food waste and encourage food redistribution.

Each of these suggestions is described in more detail in this section.



## WORK TO CHANGE POLICIES

Focus group participants offered several suggestions for changing policies, including:

- Create a law that protects Extension and MDH's SHIP employees from liability.
- Work for more consistent, common-sense food safety policies across the state.
- Work for more flexibility in food safety policies; for example, cutting apples in a classroom should not be held to the same standards as an organization preparing food for 500. [Notice that this and the previous suggestion seem to contradict one another.]
- Push to coordinate all food safety regulations under one organization.
- Push for more funding for infrastructure and staff to support these efforts.
- Allow more flexibility with grant funds.
- Push for policies that decrease access to soft drinks.
- Push to increase the healthiness of NAPS (Nutrition Assistance for Seniors Program) boxes.
- Push for reinstituting home economics classes in schools.
- Push to change Walmart by-laws so donated foods don't have to stay in the community.

Here are comments on policy changes from four focus group participants:

"There will have to be policy changes that say, 'We understand these are barriers to getting safe, healthy food into institution and schools, so we are going to support that with infrastructure and champions to do it.' So it's not everyone doing it 1 percent of their time. I could show up and support something like that [on my own time], but I couldn't do that [on work time]."

"We do need to all come under a one cap [one umbrella or one agency]. As a food service director years back, I just remember, what does school food service need? What does Minnesota Department of Health need? What does UDSA want? No matter how hard I tried to be perfect getting my whole system down, there was always something that someone would come with. It was hard because you're very busy."

"Work on making the regulations more common sense. In some cases, they seem arbitrary and not always logical. You can't say, 'Oh, we have to cook outside at the farmers market, but there's no way we could cook outside if we were going to do something for the food shelf.' I don't really think that every single person that touches food has to have a license. It's important that we understand food safety, but we don't have to all be licensed to serve healthy, safe food."

"Policies need to change too. It is unrealistic for a food shelf to have the same facilities as a restaurant."

## SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Focus group participants offered suggestions for supporting infrastructure under four categories.

### Establish an information clearinghouse for food code regulations and food safety information



The clearinghouse would be the go-to place for all information about regulations for all agencies: MDH, MDA, USDA, MDE (Minnesota Department of Education), etc. It should include a hotline.

Clearinghouse staff would:

- Know how regulations from different agencies intersect, and which ones apply in which situations.
- Act as a liaison between inspectors and licensees.
- Provide support to SNAP-Ed and SHIP staff, via a hotline, similar to “Ask a Nurse.” Staff could call with situations and be helped right away.
- Be willing to problem solve. One participant said the attitude should be “e’re here to help you figure out how you can do something rather than just telling you what you can’t do.”
- Help people navigate the system.
- Be good at communications — be able to explain regulations in an easy-to-understand way.
- Be safe — people can ask questions without feeling vulnerable or that someone will check up on them.

Here are comments on a clearinghouse from and hotline from two participants:

“I’d love to be able to call a number and say, ‘Can you tell me what I need to do for a food sampling at a farmers market?’ And someone would say, ‘Tell me what you are going to do and I will tell you what you have to have in place to do it.’ ‘I was going to do some kind of yogurt recipe.’ It would help to be able to use some kind of consultancy.”

“I’d need to know that if I called, someone wasn’t going to check on me.”

### **Establish and support food hubs and community kitchens**

Focus group participants said they believe food hubs would eliminate many of the barriers that keep institutions from using locally grown food. Food hubs would help growers, food service providers, and grocery stores. But there are areas of the state where no food hub exists.

Participants also said food hubs should be built with community kitchens that meet the Minnesota Food Code. These kitchens could be used for multiple purposes. It is getting difficult to find licensed kitchens in some counties. It is difficult to access grant money to fund community kitchens.

Participants recommended:

- Find out what has worked in other locations. For example, talk to Arlene Jones in Crow Wing County.
- Find out how food hubs handle the money.
- Map the state to see where food hub gaps exist.
- Create a manual for starting a food hub.
- Test feasibility.
- Get people to work together.
- Get state funding.
- Create food hubs with commercial facilities for processing foods and delivering them.



- Hire staff to operate the food hubs. One participant said, “This can’t be done with all volunteers or 1 percent of someone’s time.”

Other comments from participants included:

“[Create] Not only a manual, but have support at the state level. We recognize that having food hubs [is important] so our local foods are produced in a safe manner for institutions. Each region is going to have a food hub.”

“[Food hubs are] an investment to make sure the food is produced and safe. It helps farmers. It helps SHIP. It helps resilient communities”.

“I’ve been looking at grants for community kitchens and they are extremely fussy. We don’t quite fit. For a rural area to get accepted for a grant, it’s a real challenge.”

### **Establish and support three-compartment sinks**

The lack of a three-compartment sink keeps some organizations from serving or promoting healthier foods. The state should provide funds for small organizations, such as food shelves and day care centers, to install sinks that are up to food code.

Here are comments from two focus group participants on three-compartment sinks:

“It would be great if everybody had grants to install sinks and water.”

“The three-compartment sink is an issue in child care centers, especially non-traditional child care centers in urban [areas] — in church basements, for example. They often serve very low-income children, diverse children, but they have that church sink — your basic sink, not the three-compartment. So serving fresh produce in those centers for snacks or meals has been an issue. I also worked with a child care [center] this past year that was also in a church and serves 150 kids a day. They had a garden out back, but they couldn’t use the produce in their snack menu because they didn’t have an appropriate sink. That’s been a real struggle. They ended up finding a lot of good, fresh options that were pre-washed, pre-cut from US. Foods, but again, that’s more expensive than something they’ve grown in their backyard.”

### **Establish and support mobile kitchens**

SNAP-Ed employees in focus groups said they believe mobile kitchens would allow them to:

- Do their work using food-safe equipment.
- Allow them to do a wider range of food demonstrations, e.g., they could demonstrate recipes with beans and foods that take longer to cook.
- Go to where people congregate.

Here’s what one SNAP-Ed educator said:

“We need a mobile kitchen van... We’re trying to figure out how we can expose our lower income people to the EBT [Electronic Benefit Transfer] cards, that they can use [at farmers markets], [and] we want them to sample foods that they’ve never had before.”

## **CREATE NEW POSITIONS TO SUPPORT THIS WORK**

Focus group participants suggested fund the following new positions:

- A statewide food safety regulation point person.



- Regional positions that provide technical support similar to the community specialist in SHIP, but with even greater local community involvement.
- Regional positions that can help coach and facilitate community relationships and collaborations.
- A grant facilitator — someone who knows what grants are available for what purposes and helps field staff access funding. This person should also communicate outward, letting people know what is available. One participant said: “Sometimes it is hard to know where to go for money. Who has garden grants? Who has equipment grants? I spend a lot of time emailing people... It would be nice to have a resource of people who offer grants and know what’s possible.”
- Staff for food hubs.
- Staff to deal with paperwork and reports.

Here are comments on new positions from three participants:

“We were told by a school with a school garden that it couldn’t process the food it grew in the school garden in the kitchen without the food safety certification. It required extra paperwork — they weren’t going to do that. There might be a way to make it happen, but it is cumbersome.”

“I was filling out a USDA grant application, and trust me, it takes hours to do anything with USDA. Problem after problem after problem.”

“We need somebody that’s regional to go around and help facilitate getting those food collaboratives started. Someone who has that training...I can call up this person and say, ‘I want to start a food collaborative. What do I do?’ Invite them here and get the ball rolling. Because not all of us are that kind of facilitator... Facilitating that mixture of people can be difficult, not everybody can do that.”

## PROVIDE TRAINING

Focus group participants suggested the following types of training for Extension and SHIP staff.

### Food Safety

- Food safety rules and the reasoning or science behind them — training on MDH Environmental Health regulations.
- How to navigate the food safety regulation environment.
- Continuing in-service education on food safety by Extension experts.
- What will happen to them if they are involved in a food code violation: Who is liable? Will they lose their job? The training should be designed to increase confidence and decrease fear.
- The food system as a whole.

### Policy

- What’s the difference between advocacy, education, and lobbying?
- Increasing our level of comfort answering policy questions.

### Applied ways to do this work in the field

- Food Hubs 101.





- How to do food sampling at farmers markets.
- Working with child care facilities [Could Mary Schroeder [with Extension do this?]]
- Enable Extension to create webinar trainings on food safety topics.
- Have sanitarians provide training, so they do education, not just enforcement.
- Have hands-on in-person training or webinars that include demonstrations.

Here are comments on food safety training from several participants:

“This is our question: What happens if something [an accident or mishap] happens? [It would be helpful] to have a little more level of comfort. For instance, when you are trained in CPR, they say to you, ‘If you do it to the best of your ability...’ [Second person]: “[Teach] Good Samaritan laws.” [First person]: “If they did a presentation like that and made us feel better. ‘You’re going to be OK. You’re going to be safe.’”

“One thing I learned this past year is that the food service industry and regulations and departments — it’s very complicated. It is like we need an education for those of us who are working in the system. So we can navigate the system without having each one of us stumble over and over. I’m like, ‘Oh, you’ve figured out how to do that? I’m going to call you!’ But I didn’t know there was someone out there who had figured it out. That’s how we are having to work. Trying to find someone who has figured it out. A training in how to navigate this would make it a lot easier.”

“[We need] education around the policies...so even as SHIP or Extension...we can say, ‘Here are the policies. Here’s what you really can do. Here’s the red line. This is what others are doing, and what others have found to work.’ So [we need] that type of education or training.”

“[We need] clearer statements of what we can do, what we can’t do. The five of us had different ideas of who could do demos, and we all work for the same organization. Obviously communication is a big part.”

Focus group participants suggested training for the following populations.

### **Farmers**

- Provide education and coaching to help farmers through the GAP certification process.
- Provide contact information so they can get answers to their questions.
- Schedule training when it is easy for farmers to participate.
- Integrate training into other Extension programming or events for farmers. Or certify a whole group of farmers at once.

### **Child Care Providers**

- Provide training on healthy and safe foods.
- Educate more broadly, even to informal, unlicensed child care centers. Difficulty is getting them to come to training by a government agency.
- SHIP could offer “extra credit” training for child care providers — they are not required to take training on physical activity and healthy eating.

Focus group participants also suggested training methods, including:



- Develop easy-to-read, non-wordy materials.
- Make resources available on one website.
- If possible, use infographics. The Grocery Gap from Blue Cross Blue Shield is a good example: <http://www.centerforpreventionmn.com/~media/sites/cfp/files/pullingtogether/fact-sheet-grocery-gap.ashx>

Here are comments about training methods from two participants:

“I would love to see food safety information in multiple languages. The USDA turkey safety [training information] is in English and Spanish, but I have Russian and Hmong people in my county. I try to do a lot of turkey education in November because turkey is so cheap. The stories I hear about how people cook turkeys [are] kind of scary.” [Second person]: “There are materials but Extension can only use materials that are approved and research based.”

“I know the DNR [Department of Natural Resources] and MDH work together to provide a mercury level consumption chart. I don’t know if other communities were given that information. Maybe in Somali, or in the Latino/Latina community — I don’t know if it was delivered to them. I know there are a lot of different communities that love to fish and hunt. I’m worried that a lot of focus was on the Hmong community [but not others]. Is the information delivered to other communities? Consumption charts? How do we properly package fish and wild game? My elders [who I teach] don’t know how to Ziplock bag or vacuum seal it. They just roll it up in paper and throw it in the freezer.”

## PROVIDE MATERIALS

Focus group participants suggested providing materials in two main categories.

### On regulations

- Resource guide to direct people and agencies in the right direction. The guide should identify points of contact at regulatory agencies so SHIP and Extension staff know who to go to with questions.
- One pagers or short guides that clearly explain relevant food safety policies, laws, and regulations that field staff need to adhere to, e.g., for food shelf food demos. These should include clear statements of what you can do and what you can’t do.
- One pagers or short guides that clearly explain relevant food safety policies, laws, and regulations that others besides field staff must adhere to, e.g., grocers, farmers, day care centers, food shelves, schools. These should include clear statements of what you can do and what you can’t do.
- A handout with an outline of what you need certification or licensure for, and what is required to get it.
- Talking points related to these issues that we can use in our communities.
- Simple resources for people seeking food safety licenses, so they don’t fear inspections.
- A one-page statement that says it is OK for institutions to buy produce from farmers.

### Supporting teaching

- A “cheat sheet” for what is needed to do food demonstrations.
- Curriculum specific to food safety.
- Food safety training materials for new immigrants in their language, e.g., Somali, Hmong, Russian, Karen, Karenni, Spanish.

- ServSafe® training.
- How to cook a turkey safely.
- Consumption charts for fish and game.
- How to safely package fish and wild game.
- A range of recipes for demonstrations that are easier to prepare safely and appeal to different populations.
- A list of the safest foods that to use those in demonstrations.
- A handout to share with grocers and restaurants on the benefits of donating food, plus talking points for approaching potential donors.

## PROVIDE DIRECTION

Some SNAP-Ed and SHIP employees wanted to know where and how to start working in this area. They want direction. Some want concrete, specific guidance on:

- How to change food policy.
- How to create a healthy food culture.

## ENCOURAGE RELATIONSHIPS

Focus group participants suggested several means by which key relationships could be strengthened.

- Strengthen the relationship between SNAP-Ed and SHIP employees.
  - Encourage working together, starting with projects they agree on.
  - Help SNAP-Ed and SHIP staff understand how to interact with each other.
  - Provide examples of how SNAP-Ed and SHIP have worked together on the local level. (Some regions seem to have strong relationships already, but others are less connected.)
  - Help SNAP-Ed and SHIP employees understand what support and resources each agency brings to the table.
- Encourage SNAP-Ed and SHIP employees to get to know their sanitarians. Encourage a relationship between MDH's Environmental Health, SHIP, and SNAP-Ed, so they can work together. As one participant said, "So when [field staff] go to the grocery store, they can [tell store operators], 'This is what you can do if you wanted to do locally grown produce.' That would be a good PSE change."
- Encourage food safety staff to get to know field staff, so field staff feel comfortable asking questions.
- When developing and implementing this statewide plan of work, work across agencies — MDH, MDA, and MDE. Also, listen to and include community members. Here are comments from three focus group participants on working across agencies:

"A conversation needs to be had on how our initiatives can work together. SHIP...has assumed to know what we [SNAP-Ed staff] do and what our role is. In some counties 'the SHIP has sailed' without utilizing, in the right way, the great program that SNAP-Ed is!"

“[We should collaborate more] because you guys [SNAP-Ed staff] can do the education piece to a degree that we can’t. We can’t fund education. It’s almost like we need to pair our funding.”

“When the first PSE came out a year and a half ago, we were just told, as [is] typical [with the] University, ‘Just go out there and do this stuff.’ SHIP had six people working on an effort and there was only one of me [from SNAP-Ed]. They come in and they’ve got beautiful presentations and handouts. These food shelves were hearing from six people who had their ducks in a row. It’s like, ‘Yeah, that’s what I was trying to do.’ ...Sometimes it is unclear where we [SNAP-Ed] fit in...Even in the presentation with the food shelves, it was unclear. SHIP was wanting to say, ‘Now SNAP educator, you can come in and do the food demos.’ I don’t think it was clear to [SHIP] that, no we can’t.”

## **PROVIDE LONG-TERM CONSISTENT FUNDING**

Focus group participants said they need long-term, consistent funding to address these long-term, complex issues. Some said, if this is a priority, fund it like a priority. One participant’s comments:

“It’s nice to have grant funding to meet needs, but when grant funding goes away, the need still exists. How do you fund it? There has to be buy-in by the Department of Health, by the Department of Ag, by the local people that this is a need. This is a priority regardless of where grant dollars might be. Otherwise, you get that whiplash of start, stop, chase money, start, stop, chase money. I’ve been in SHIP since the beginning, so I’ve had multiple cases of whiplash.”

## **REDUCE FOOD WASTE AND ENCOURAGE FOOD REDISTRIBUTION**

Participants suggested these ideas for reducing waste in their own programs:

- Work with the Public Health Law Center (at Mitchell Hamline School of Law) to create a waiver that people could sign so they could take food home after classes or demonstrations.
- Change the law to protect Extension from being sued.
- Create a container that ensures that the food is transferred home safely.
- Find out how other organizations, such as Carleton College (or Minnesota State University, Mankato, deal with liability and redistribution and create a way for others to do the same, including Extension.

### **Participants suggested these ideas for reducing waste in other settings:**

- Clarify liability.
- Clarify what the Good Samaritan Law covers.
- Create a handout that explains tax benefits of redistributing foods to stores and restaurants.
- Create a policy or system that makes it easy for stores to redistribute produce.

One focus group participant said:

“There should be some policy around food waste at grocery stores, especially around produce — instead of throwing it away. We [as a society] waste 40 percent of our food. It is just thrown in the trash. Is there a way to have a policy to make it easier for grocery stores that have a lot of produce that they are going to get rid of for whatever reason to offer it to the community, to do something instead of just throwing it in the trash? And not make it a burden on the grocery store — not that they have to spend more money or hire a new staff member, but to have a system or policy to make it possible for them to [easily redistribute the food].”



# Things to Remember

Focus group participants gave many tips for developing a plan of work to implement their suggestions:

- Don't do it alone.
- Build ownership.
- Start with quick wins.
- Concentrate on helping us do our jobs.
- Don't duplicate efforts.

Each of these tips is described in participants' own words in this section.



## **DON'T DO IT ALONE**

"You have already listened with the interviews and focus groups, so you know what the issues [are] now. Now it is just putting it into a plan. Make sure to involve boots on the ground."

"Make sure MDH [SHIP] and Extension leadership are all on the same page when they roll it out to us. [Address the question of] why can this part of the state do something and another part of the state can't — in the exact same program."

"Get a diverse group together so you're all working together and sharing ideas on how to tackle each problem. Include people with different expertise and networks. Involve or get input from community members."

"When designing resources, have a committee to help you."

"Individual efforts may get lost. We need to be part of a structured, named, physical group...so the actions seem amplified."

## **BUILD OWNERSHIP**

"The Food Charter seems like big picture. Help us feel like we belong to this project. Have people organize around local issues that are immediately addressable."

"We already have enough on our plates. There are a lot of groups working on different things. Until we have some kind of direction and clearly understand [what role we can play], I think this is out of our hands. This has to do with policy."

## **START WITH QUICK WINS**

"Break the POW [plan of work] into smaller tasks so people feel empowered. Start with things that are doable. Take care of policies later."

"Try to figure out those short-term, easy wins, like clarifying the existing policies. Once that information gets disseminated in a clear way, it may bring up other issues and the root problems that we're kind of talking around but maybe don't really have our heads wrapped around. So, focusing on those easy things like education, clarifying policies. Then see what comes out of that that could be longer term."

## **CONCENTRATE ON HELPING US DO OUR JOBS**

"Get us the information we need to educate. Education is important and there has been a lapse for us."

"Focus on how to make it easier for us to work within these policies. Is there room for change of these policies? A way to ease up?"

## **DON'T DUPLICATE EFFORTS**

"Coordinate efforts, so you don't have four different groups (in one area) doing the same thing."

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2. **Fax:** 202-690-7442
3. **Email:** [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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For any other information dealing with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) issues, persons should either contact the USDA SNAP Hotline Number at 1-800-221-5689, which is also in Spanish or call the MN Food HelpLine at 1-888-711-1151.

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